

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MAY 15, 1838.

Submitted, and ordered to be printed.

Mr. RIVES submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany Senate Bill No. 55.]

The Committee on Naval Affairs of the Senate, to whom was referred the bill "to establish and regulate the navy ration, and for other purposes," report the same with amendments:

The first object of the bill is to change the ration in several very important points.

In recommending this change, the committee rely much on the opinions which have been expressed by the Board of Navy Commissioners and other naval officers of great experience and discretion, as will be seen by the documents which accompany and make part of this report.

The alterations will be seen by comparing the ration as proposed in the first section of this bill with the ration as it is now fixed by law and regulation, which is shown in paper A, hereto annexed.

They feel solicitous that the spirit portion of the ration should meet the approbation of Congress. They have excluded all persons under age from its use, and given them a commutation in money. They have also reduced it in quantity, and authorized the exchange of it for other articles, and a compensation in money to those of full age who would decline its use. This was considered as far as it was expedient to go at this time.

The committee suppose that no serious objection will be urged against this alteration.

The consequences of the change of the ration upon the pursers will be so great, that the committee have felt it indispensable to unite a regulation of their pay and emoluments in the same bill; for, if the proposed change takes place and no provision be made for them, it will be impossible for them to retain and discharge the duties of their offices.

There are few officers on whose fidelity and skill the public interests depend more than on the pursers. The office requires great industry, care, and experience. Without these, neither their character nor the public interests can be safe. Their responsibility, in taking care of the public property and keeping and disbursing large sums of money, is great. They are the substitute for, and perform the duties of, several officers in the army, as will be seen by the accompanying documents; they give large bonds of

\$25,000 for the faithful performance of their duties ; they have not before them any higher rank to which time and correct conduct may carry them ; their reward is in the pecuniary profits which the law may afford, and to which they look for the maintenance, education, and support of their families ; they must, like other officers, hold themselves in readiness for absence from home, and cannot enter, at any time, with any hope of success, into other employments from which profit may arise ; they are associated, both at home and abroad, with other naval officers, and subjected to the proper and necessary expenses of such associations ; and when in port, these expenses are much increased, while employed in procuring on shore the necessary supplies for the ships. Under these circumstances, the committee have thought it fit and proper that they should receive full and adequate compensation.

Heretofore they have been paid by law the sum of \$40 per month and 2 rations per day, and have been allowed a percentage upon slops and other supplies, and, consequently, the amount which they received could be ascertained only on the settlement of their accounts.

It will be perceived at once that their pay proper is quite inadequate, and Congress would doubtless have made other and better provisions for them when the law of the 3d of March, 1835, fixing the pay of the navy, was passed ; but the difficulty of arranging the details would have thrown obstacles in the way of the passage of that just and necessary law.

It will also be perceived that their principal compensation has resulted from the percentage on articles sold to the seamen, and which is charged against, and deducted from, their monthly pay. To this, there are conclusive objections :

1st. There can be no good reason given for taxing seamen with the support of our public officers. The Government ought to provide for its officers. It is quite unworthy of its honor to support them by making an extra charge upon the articles which the sailor finds necessary for his convenience and comfort.

2d. This per centage being laid chiefly on articles sold by the pursers to the men, it has been supposed by some to be impossible to discover the exact amount of compensation which the former have actually received. Hence, most inaccurate statements of their profits have been frequently promulgated, and prejudices and complaints arisen to the injury of both the pursers and the public.

3d. As the amount of profit to the officer has arisen from the amount of articles sold, there has been a prevalent impression that inducements have been held out to seamen to buy more than was necessary for their comfort ; and the character of the disbursing officers has been subjected to injurious imputations. While the committee do not admit the justice of these imputations, and believe that there has seldom, in this or any other country, been a more correct and valuable class of officers, still, they think it discreet and prudent to remove the cause of these unfounded accusations.

It is believed that the plan proposed by this bill will avoid the difficulties heretofore felt or imagined on these points, and render the service more popular for the seamen, as well as more respectable for this class of officers and for the country.

A short statement of the several provisions of the bill, will exhibit the grounds on which the committee think this branch of the public service ought to be placed.

The first and leading provision of the bill, next to the ration, is, that the disbursing officer shall have no pecuniary or other personal interest in procuring, purchasing, and supplying everything which may be necessary for the service, and for the comfort, convenience, and support of our seamen. Heretofore an important portion of these articles, called small stores, and consisting of groceries, &c., have been laid in by the pursers, and it may well be supposed to have been their interest so to manage the purchase and sale as to secure to themselves the best profit. The committee think this ought to be done by the Government, with its own funds; and that they should be dealt out and disbursed in such way as to save the Government from loss, but at the same time to make no profit out of them; a profit which must come from the pockets of the hardy but uncalculating men who serve it. The 6th, 7th, and 8th sections are intended to provide for, and are esteemed sufficient to accomplish this most desirable object.

The 10th section provides for the annual pay of pursers, and upon it the committee would remark—

1. That this annual pay is a fixed sum, to be given to the purser at all times, as compensation for his readiness to meet the calls of the Government, and for the support of himself and family; and the amount was fixed, because it was believed that in most cases defined salaries best suit the nature of our institutions, and the course adopted of late years by Congress in other cases, as well as in the law establishing the pay of the navy. And it seemed peculiarly necessary here, because by it the pensions must be regulated.

2. This pay is graduated by time and length of service, because, as age advances, and the wants and claims of his family increase, the officer who devotes himself to the public, ought, in mere justice, to have additional means to meet them.

3. The amount of annual pay proposed by the committee, is the same which the surgeons now receive by law, *when not on duty*. When in actual service, they receive an appropriate addition, viz: one-third advance. This addition for the pursers is regulated by a subsequent section. The committee could perceive no good reason, either in the nature of their offices, or in the duties to be performed, for drawing a distinction between those two classes of officers, and therefore fixed the pay of pursers at that which Congress have decided was the just compensation for the surgeon when not on duty. (See law of March 3, 1835.)

But while on duty the condition of pursers is totally different from that of surgeons, and every other class of officers in the navy. Their responsibility is pecuniary. They are subjected to the rules and regulations of the service, and must obey as others do, or meet the penalty of disobedience. But they deal, ordinarily and officially, not in the management and care of our yards and ships, nor with the conflicts of battle, although they are sometimes thus employed; and there are some illustrious instances in which they have acquired high honor, by mingling in these as voluntary aids in hours of danger; but their appropriate employment is to handle and be responsible for goods, provisions, and money; and their compensations should be regulated accordingly. It is apparent that their responsibility is in proportion to the amount of property which they are called upon to take care of and to manage; and the bonds which they give to the Government, subject their securities to a hazard proportionate to that amount.

One purser, in a schooner or sloop, will have intrusted to him a com-

paratively small sum ; while another, in a frigate or ship of the line, will be compelled to keep and manage one which is ten or twenty times greater. To pay them the same salary, would be alike unreasonable and unjust.

The committee could devise no mode of administering equal justice, according to their respective responsibilities, but by giving them, in the first place, a fit sum, for the devotion of their time to the public, and their exclusion from other employments ; and then, in the second place, allowing them a per centage on the amount intrusted to their care. In this mode, and in this only, all the ends of justice to them and to their securities, and to the public, might be answered.

In deciding on the rate of per centage, the committee have been principally governed by the sum which would be produced thereby, in vessels of different classes. This was sought, by taking, as far as practicable, an average of the results in vessels of the various classes for several years.

The per centage allowed is believed to be quite within the limits which justice requires, and will, in no case, with the annual pay, afford a reward at all proportioned to that which the merchant receives for transacting, for others, business of the same kind, which is seldom less than five per cent.

But the profits of the merchant are not in all respects a correct guide. He hazards more than the purser, and should be suitably recompensed for that hazard. The purser has a regular and safe employer for life. He may well, therefore, agree to receive less profits on any single transaction.

But the committee have also thought that the per centage was not an infallible guide to the amount of compensation. It might amount, under peculiar circumstances, to more than would be proper to pay to public officers for their service to the country, in pecuniary employment. They have, therefore, thought it fit to fix a limit, beyond which the receipts of the officer should not reach, in any of our yards or vessels. This is justified by more than one consideration.

1. The time of service which will justify the appointment to the different classes of vessels is fixed, and thereby the young and inexperienced are precluded, and justly so, from the highest rewards of long and devoted service, and their compensation limited to what is appropriate for them.

2. The responsibility is in proportion to the size or class of vessel in which the service is performed.

The sums prescribed as the limit in the several cases, cannot be regarded as prodigal or extravagant. Should any esteem those allowed in the largest vessels too great, the committee would remind them, that it is seldom more than once or twice in a life, that a purser is so favored as to be placed in them. Our navy is small. It consists principally of vessels of the lower classes. And it is believed that in the long list of our old pursers, there are but five who have ever served in a ship of the line, and but about fifteen or sixteen who have served in frigates, and seldom more than during a single cruise.

There is no danger that they will become wealthy by their employment, especially upon the terms furnished by the bill which is now reported.

In fact, the impression which prevails with some, as to their profits and wealth, is totally unfounded ; and if it were justified by facts it would be but another argument in favor of this bill, which renders such results impossible.

The next feature of the bill which demands attention is that which pre-

scribes the time of service and date of appointment, as the guide to selection for particular yards and vessels. This has been deemed necessary—

1st. To prevent executive favoritism, which has, probably, under all administrations, been more or less a cause of complaint. It is always well to limit discretion in this respect, where it can be done with perfect security to the public interests, and, the committee believe, has been amply secured by this bill. But,

2d. A more important consideration is, to secure a safe and satisfactory discharge of the duties of this officer. They are peculiar. No young and inexperienced man can perform them without hazard to himself and the public interests. They require a proper apprenticeship. With adequate capacity and acquirements, they may be discharged, on a limited scale, by those who are not trained to them; but intrust them to inexperience, and the consequences may be eminently cause of regret.

The scale proposed by the bill is believed to be prudent and safe.

3d. It is wise to hold out to faithful performance of duty, augmented rewards and growing profits; to long service, increased and increasing recompense.

The committee earnestly hope this provision will meet the approbation of the Senate.

The Senate will perceive that the bill provides a clerk, or assistant to the purser, in those vessels where the largest duties are to be performed, and grants certain immunities to him.

This is to be justified by the following reasons:

1. Aid to the purser is often absolutely indispensable. It is impossible for him alone to perform the duties. He must not only have a clerk or assistant, but also stewards, according to the size of the vessel. In a ship of the line, of two or three decks, for example, he cannot attend to all the duties in person; and yet he is responsible for what is done. He ought to be assisted by those for whom he must answer.

2. His office is one of pecuniary responsibility. He ought, therefore, to have those to aid him for whom he is willing to be responsible. It would not do to let a captain or any other select for him, unless, indeed, our naval officers are not like other men, but free from all weakness, prejudice, and partiality.

3. This assistant ought to be placed in a condition of respect and security, such as the clerk of the commanding officer. He must have equal capacity, and, for the public interest, ought to be not less respectable.

4. While these indispensable objects are kept in view, it is also necessary that no inferior officer should be permitted to bring on board an unfit associate, or one who would disturb the harmony or discipline so absolutely necessary for the success of our cruisers on the ocean. Hence the reference to the approbation of the commanding officer. To secure these objects rather for the public than the purser, the provisions of the bill are regarded as necessary.

In a new arrangement and new assignment of duties, there might be some hazard that the bonds heretofore given by these officers might be subjected to question in point of law. Hence the 13th section.

There is still another provision which the committee consider important: Rewards are offered by our laws for capturing vessels of the national enemy. The rights in cases of prize are of deep interest to officers and seamen. Heretofore it has been the legal practice for those interested to

appoint, as prize agent, whomsoever they might choose to select. It is not proposed by this bill to take away this privilege ; although it is quite within the competency of Congress to do so, if it were deemed expedient. But it is thought proper that there should be provided by law a competent public officer to perform this duty, unless those interested should otherwise resolve.

The evil which will be avoided and the benefits obtained by this section are :

1. Under the present arrangement it must necessarily happen that the selection of prize agent will always be made by the commanding officer, and a few others in authority, while the seamen will have little or no prevailing voice in the matter. This will generally result well ; for those who select are most competent to do so ; but still the seamen, in proportion to their little all in the world, are not less deeply concerned, and ought to have proportionate right in the choice.

2. The purser is always at hand, when the occasion calls for his interference. He is a known public officer, under bonds, and may therefore be safely trusted with this interest ; known to the officers and men, and generally possessing their confidence.

3. The Government have an equal interest in the prize, and ought to have an equal chance with others in the control of it.

4. It often happens that many of those concerned cannot, at the proper time, apply to the prize agent for their share, and hence it is lost to them, and left in the hands of one who has no right to its enjoyment. If in the hands of the purser, this evil would be avoided ; for the claimant would always apply through the Government for what was due him.

5. If application was not made in proper time, the amount would be properly placed in the pension fund, which is the result of prizes, and might be called for, at any time, by the claimant or his heirs ; and, if never called for, would add to that most useful source of comfort to the corps of which the claimant was a member.

6. An officer, under bonds to the Government, would generally be a more safe agent and depositary, than an individual solicited by the partiality of the more influential persons, who are interested in such cases ; and being under the direct and immediate control of the department, might be compelled properly and promptly to settle up the concern.

If it is objected that this would be a new duty and new responsibility, not anticipated when the previous bonds were given, it may be answered that the bill provides for the emergency in the 16th section, of which new bonds, in full view of all responsibility, both of principal and security, may be taken.

But every objection seems to the committee to be avoided, when it is recollected that those interested are not obliged to select the purser as prize agent. It merely provides, that if he be selected, he shall be under such control as to secure a safe and satisfactory discharge of his duty in that respect.

In conclusion, the committee recommend this bill, which was introduced by one of its members, and referred to them, to the favorable consideration of the Senate ; and under the strong conviction that if it becomes a law, it will greatly promote the best interests of the naval service of the country. It will promote economy in expenditure ; increase the popularity of the service among seamen, by relieving them from an unjust charge upon their

pay; secure to pursers a defined and proper compensation; and enable the public, from the face of the law, to understand the precise amount beyond which the pay and emoluments of officers of this class cannot reach.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
February 2, 1838.

SIR: Your letter enclosing the bill No. 55, to establish and regulate the navy ration and for other purposes, was duly received, and the subject referred to the Commissioners of the Navy Board.

They have made two reports upon this as well as upon a similar bill from the House of Representatives—one as to the navy ration, and the other as to the residue of the bill, copies of which I enclose to you. I entirely concur with the commissioners in the opinions they have expressed. The bill is returned.

I have the honor to be,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

MAHLON DICKERSON.

The Hon. WM. C. RIVES,

Senate Chamber.

P. S.—I enclose, for your information, a tabular statement of the expenditures made by the pursers at the several navy yards, for the consecutive years 1834, 1835, and 1836.

TABULAR STATEMENT of the expenditures made by the pursers at the several yards and stations of Portsmouth, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Norfolk, and Pensacola, for the three consecutive years 1834, 1835, and 1836.

	1834.	1835.	1836.
Portsmouth - - -	\$35,080 75	\$66,167 96	\$60,811 35
Boston - - -	180,125 81	202,466 13	289,570 29
New York - - -	179,631 38	207,842 24	408,794 80
Philadelphia - - -	90,785 57	128,506 76	218,454 22
Baltimore - - -	33,026 82	48,574 08	51,338 96
Washington - - -	95,882 82	150,852 20	157,842 02
Norfolk - - -	300,371 72	371,498 03	436,858 01
Pensacola - - -	76,209 84	68,192 88	70,986 46

NAVY COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE,
January 22, 1838.

SIR: The board have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this date, referring to them a Senate bill, No. 55, "to establish and regulate the navy ration, and for other purposes," and also of a bill of the House of Representative, No. 834, the latter being of the second session of the 24th Congress, but relating to the same subject.

In compliance with your directions, the board have carefully considered that part of these bills which relates to the navy ration, comprising the five first sections of both bills, and respectfully report: That the operations of this part of those bills would, in the opinion of the board, be highly advantageous to the service, after receiving the following slight modifications, viz:

In the 5th line of the 1st and 2d sections of both bills, strike out the words "fourteen ounces," and insert "one pound." In the 12th line of the 3d section Senate bill, and 11th of the 3d section of House bill, strike out the words "spirits;" and after the word "other," in the 13th line of the 3d section of both bills, insert the words "and for spirits." At the end of the 4th section of the Senate bill, strike out the words "and furnish a copy thereof to the purser," and insert in their place, and at the end of the 4th section of the House bill, the words "and the purser shall be furnished by the commander of the vessel with a written order, specifying the particular reductions or variations which may be made."

The board present their views upon this branch of the bill separately, as it seems desirable that it should receive early action, should Congress be disposed to act upon it separately.

The other part of the bill relating to pursers requires time for examination before a correct opinion can be formed upon its practical effects, which examination will be made, and the views of the board submitted to you, as soon as may be practicable.

To enable the necessary instructions to reach the vessels employed on distant service, it is proposed that the law making the change should take effect on the 1st day of January next.

I have the honor to be, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

I. CHAUNCEY.

Hon. MAHLON DICKERSON,
Secretary of the Navy.

NAVY COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE,
January 30, 1838.

SIR: In conformity with your instructions, the Board of Navy Commissioners have examined the bills from the Senate, and from the House of Representatives, which relate to the navy ration and compensation of the pursers of the navy, and have now the honor to state their views upon that portion of those bills which relates to the pursers. It appears desirable that the amendments which have been made in the 10th and 13th lines of the 6th section of the bill from the Senate, should also be made in the 10th and 13th lines of the 6th section of the bill from the House.

The expediency of amending the 7th section of the bills, by inserting

the words "*person in*" between the words "*for*" and "*the*," where they first occur in the 4th line: and by striking out the word "*is*," in the same section, from the 10th line, in the bill from the Senate, and the 9th line in the bill from the House of Representatives, and inserting in its stead the words "*may be deemed*," is respectfully suggested.

The sections 8, 11, and 14, of the bill from the Senate, and sections 8 and 11 of the bill from the House of Representatives, appear to embrace, in the opinion of the board, subjects which can be better arranged by Executive regulations than by law. All the material provisions of the 8th section are now embraced by the existing regulations of the Navy and Treasury Departments; and so long as they are left to regulations, these may be modified as may be found necessary.

The provisions of the 11th section, if enacted as laws, might, in the opinion of the board, impose restrictions upon the department that would sometimes be unfavorable to the public interests. As a general rule, it seems to be conceded that the particular manner in which persons connected with military or naval service shall be employed, can be best regulated by Executive authority and regulation; nor do the board perceive any good reason why the pursers should form an exception to such general practice.

Section 14 of the Senate bill appears to be unnecessary, since it merely declares that pursers may act as prize-agents when duly appointed by the parties interested; a privilege which they now enjoy, in common with all others, without legislation.

The 9th section of the Senate bill, and of that of the House of Representatives, both propose to grant an assistant to the purser in vessels of certain classes. The Senate bill proposes to grant this assistant in addition to the steward, which is now allowed. Both bills propose that this assistant should be left to the selection of the purser, subject only to the approbation of the commander, and that he shall be entitled to the privileges of a stowage, or, in other words, of a warrant-officer.

The first question which presents itself is, whether additional assistance is necessary to enable the purser to perform his duties, without imposing upon him, and his present assistant or steward, an undue or injurious amount of labor; and if any further assistance should be considered necessary in any, then in what class of vessels.

The board are aware that, for some years past, pursers have frequently paid their stewards a sum in addition to that allowed by the Government, for the alleged purpose, as the board have understood, of obtaining persons who would be more competent to aid them in keeping their accounts, than could be obtained at the wages allowed by the Government. With the aid of these persons, however, there does not appear to have been any difficulty in performing the duties of purser in any class of our vessels, at any time; and it is believed that, at an earlier period, the duties of pursers were well performed in vessels, with the aid only of the stewards who were obtained at Government wages. To enable the board to form a more correct opinion of the relative duties of the pursers at this time, and at former periods, they addressed a letter to the Fourth Auditor for information; and from his reply, it appears that no increase has been lately made, or is now contemplated, in the duties of those officers. Copies are annexed, marked A and B.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, the board are of opinion

that no additional assistance is or will be required in vessels below the class of a frigate.

For vessels of that class, and for ships of the line, they would recommend that a "clerk" should be allowed to the purser, in addition to the steward, to be nominated by the purser, and subject to the approval of the commander of the vessel, or of the squadron.

This arrangement can be made, and the compensation be established, as is now done at some of the navy yards; and, if deemed expedient, the compensation of stewards of sloops of war, or other vessels, can be raised by order of the President, under existing laws, and without further legislation. Unless, therefore, it shall be deemed preferable to regulate by law, than to leave these subjects to the discretion of the Executive, no further legislation appears to be necessary upon this subject.

In case it should be deemed proper to regulate the subject by law, the board would respectfully suggest that the annual compensation of the purser's clerk should be, when employed in ships of the line, six hundred and fifty dollars, and when employed in frigates, five hundred dollars, and one ration per day.

The extension of the privilege of a warrant or steerage officer by law, to a person who is appointed in the mode proposed, is deemed inconsistent with naval usage, and the board recommend that it be left subject to regulation, or the discretion of the commander of the vessel.

The sections of the bills from the two Houses of Congress, which propose to regulate the compensation of pursers when employed, vary materially in their provisions. That from the Senate proposes a per centage upon expenditures, in addition to certain salaries, and that from the House proposes fixed salaries, without other regard to their disbursements than those which may naturally be presumed from the situations in which they may be employed.

Both propositions have advantages and disadvantages which are peculiar to each, and differences of opinion may exist, as to which may, upon the whole, be preferable.

When the expenditure, or other contingency, will, in all cases, furnish an adequate compensation to those who would receive the least, by the charge of a uniform per centage, some of the objections which might be urged against its application to very large amounts might be removed, by a provision which should establish a maximum sum, that might be deemed a sufficient compensation, under any circumstances; but even this, by leaving the compensation of many uncertain, and, in a great degree, unknown, would frequently lead to very erroneous estimates by different persons, and be calculated to produce dissatisfaction.

The board are, therefore, of opinion, that a fixed compensation for the pursers is preferable to a compensation which is contingent upon the amount of moneys which may be expended by them.

The Senate bill proposes for pursers, *when employed in vessels*, a certain per centage upon the amount of pay, accruing to the officers and others in vessels, during the time the purser is charged with her accounts, in addition to a fixed salary, to be regulated by his length of service, and to a per centage on any other disbursements he may make, excepting for provisions received from the public stores. If this per centage was made applicable to the amount of *pay only*, which might accrue to the officers and crew, the amount could be so readily ascertained that a rate of per centage

might be established, which would secure any given rate of compensation that might be deemed desirable.

If, however, the per centage is to apply to *other disbursements*, the amount could not be estimated with any degree of accuracy, and its practical effects might be very different from the intention of those who should authorize it. For example, it is usual when it is necessary for bills to be drawn for the wants of a squadron on foreign service, when no agent is present, for the purser of that vessel, in which the commander of the squadron may be, to draw bills for all that may be required of the squadron. Upon these bills, when approved by the commander of the squadron, the purser receives the proceeds, which he pays over to other pursers as required for the respective vessels, and which they afterwards disburse for their use. In this case, the per centage would, under the bill, be twice paid by the Government on the amount thus paid over, and the purser of the ship of the commanding officer of the squadron, would receive more than a fair proportion, according to the actual expenses of the vessel to which he was attached.

If, therefore, it should be deemed preferable to grant a per centage instead of a fixed sum, it seems to be desirable that it should be confined to the actual amount of *pay* which should accrue to the officers and others attached to the vessel, whilst they were borne for *pay* on the books of the vessel, during the time the purser should be charged with, and accountable for, the same; or, if extended to all his disbursements excepting for provisions, then to be limited to an amount which, together with his regular pay, should not exceed a certain specified sum, according to the class of vessel in which he may be employed.

The graduation of the *pay* of unemployed pursers according to their length of service, does not seem to rest upon as strong reasons as those which induced that graduation for the medical corps. The medical officers cannot anticipate with any degree of certainty other emolument than their established pay.

The pursers, on the contrary, according to the propositions of the bill, are to receive those appointments which will carry with them an increase of compensation, as they advance in the term of their service. These contingent employments, if the compensation attached to them is liberal, which it is hoped may be the case, will be fully equivalent to any advantage which the medical officers can ever hope to realize from the increase of compensation accruing from their length of service. With these impressions, the board think it would be preferable that the unemployed or leave of absence and the furlough pay should be the same for all pursers, instead of being graduated according to their length of service.

With respect to the *rate* or *amount* of compensation, the board are of opinion that it should be ample, to secure the services of intelligent and honorable men, and to fully remunerate them for their labors, their risks, and their responsibilities. Whether the plan of a fixed compensation, or one dependant upon disbursements, be adopted, the compensation determined upon should be designated, as in full, for all services that may be required of them, connected with the naval service, and as entitling the Government to their undivided services.

Having regard to these considerations, the board are of opinion that the amounts proposed by the bill from the House of Representatives for pursers,

when employed in vessels in commission, will be a liberal compensation for their services and responsibilities.

The proposed compensation for pursers, when employed in navy yards, appears too small for the larger yards, at which great expenditures are made, and much labor and responsibility imposed: the board respectfully suggest, therefore, the expediency of either establishing two rates of pay, giving the same compensation to the pursers of the large yards, or yards of the first class, as in frigates, and for the smaller yards or stations the same as in sloops of war; or to authorize the President to regulate their pay so as not to exceed that which may be established for frigates, nor be less than that established for sloops of war.

With respect to their compensation when on leave of absence, or on furlough, the compensation, as at present established, for lieutenants of the navy under similar circumstances, is respectfully suggested as proper for the pursers.

It may be proper to remark, that by the present phraseology of the bill from the Senate, the 10th section refers generally to *all* disbursing officers, when granting the three and a half per cent. commission; whilst the subsequent exceptions only relate to the articles of provisions on board vessels, and pursers of navy yards. This, taken in connexion with the repealing clause, would give the navy agents a right to charge and receive the three and a half per cent. upon all their disbursements; which, it is presumed, was not intended, as it would, in some cases, be upwards of thirty thousand dollars per annum.

The 12th section of the bill from the House of Representatives, and 13th of that from the Senate, seem to be very desirable.

The expediency of amending the 13th section of the bill from the House, and the 15th of that from the Senate, by striking out the words "for approval," in the 3d line of both, is respectfully suggested.

When these words have been inserted in other cases somewhat similar, they have been construed to prohibit the operation of regulations prepared until Congress should give them their express approbation. It seems to be important that the regulations which the law may render necessary should be ready to take effect contemporaneously with the changes which the law contemplates; and as no regulations which might be prepared would have any legal effect if they were contrary to the law, it is respectfully recommended that the law should permit the regulations and the provisions of the law to go into effect at the same time.

In the last sections of the two bills, provision is made for the time when the law should go into effect. Believing it to be of considerable importance that the changes proposed should take effect at nearly the same time, and that sufficient time should be allowed for communicating the necessary information and making the arrangements which the proposed changes of the ration and the purser's duties will require, the board are of opinion that it will be advisable to establish the first day of January next, as the period when the provisions of the law shall take effect.

The bills and other papers referred to the board are herewith returned.

I have the honor to be, sir,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

I. CHAUNCEY.

Hon. MAHLON DICKERSON,

Secretary of the Navy.

A.

NAVY COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE,

January 25, 1838.

SIR: The bills for regulating the pay and allowances of pursers, which have been [reported] by the committees of Congress, have been referred to this board for their views upon them.

To enable the board to form a correct opinion upon some of the propositions, they request you will be pleased to inform them whether the existing regulations of your office, or those which you propose soon to issue, will impose more duty or labor upon the pursers than were imposed by the regulations which existed some twenty or thirty years since.

I am, sir, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant.

I. CHAUNCEY.

JOHN C. PICKETT, Esq.,

Fourth Auditor.

B.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,

Fourth Auditor's Office, January 26, 1838.

SIR: I have the honor to state, in reply to your letter of the 25th instant, concerning the duties of pursers, that the existing regulations of this office, and those proposed soon to be issued, do not impose more duty or labor on those officers than were required of them by the regulations twenty or thirty years since.

I am, sir, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

J. C. PICKETT,

Auditor.

Commodore I. CHAUNCEY,

President of the Board of Navy Commissioners.

[The following document was made out and handed to the committee by the pursers.]

DUTY OF PURSERS AT SEA.

Upon joining a vessel, a purser's first duty is to make his estimates, upon which are predicated his requisitions for all supplies—say money, clothing, provisions, small stores, &c. He then proceeds to examine these supplies, seeing that they correspond in quantity and quality with his requisitions; that the provisions are good and wholesome, before receipting for the same; and has them taken on board and stowed in their appropriate parts of the vessel. The vessel being now provisioned and furnished with its clothing for the cruise, or a part of it, is in a state of preparation to receive its officers and crew, when the purser proceeds to make his muster, pay, and receipt rolls; these rolls containing the name and number of every individual on board of it, and on which are recorded in some ten or fifteen

columns to each, the data that enables him to continue from day to day, every change that may take place in the ship's company during the whole of her cruise. After which, he commences to open his set of books: these consist of a day-book, in which is charged to each officer and man's separate account every article and all money in separate items, with which he may be furnished from day to day, during the period they may be attached to said vessel. His next book is the slop of Government clothing account, in which is charged every article with which each officer and man is furnished, its price, &c.; and in this book he takes monthly, on each separate account, the individual's receipt. We come next to his provision abstract books, which contain the receipt and expenditure of all provisions which are issued out *daily* in small quantities to the officers and men's messes, and a distinct account kept of them. We next come to his leger, in which again he transcribes and condenses from all his other books and rolls a statement of each person's account from time to time, showing how he stands with the Government on the books of the purser. And then commences his book of record of all requisitions for stationery, fuel, oil, candles, and all contingent supplies; of all applications for surveys on public property in his charge, and the reports of such surveys; of all his correspondence with officers of the department, and with the Treasury. He keeps, also, what is called an undrawn ration abstract, setting forth the fractions of the component parts of the navy ration that may have been drawn by individuals, separating them from the parts not drawn at all, for which the person is entitled to money in lieu, and pays this, which is one of the most complicated of a purser's duties. He makes, also, duplicate transfer accounts of every officer and man from the vessel. He keeps a book of record of allotments granted by officers and men for the support of their families, which opens an intricate account between himself and the Navy Department, and almost every navy agent in the country, who pay these allotments, and charge them to the purser of the vessel. From this it will be seen that he has, according to the rate of vessel to which he may be attached, from 100 to 1,000 accounts, to which he is compelled to have daily, and it may be said hourly, reference. In addition to these duties, the purser is required to make monthly returns of the officers, crew, and marines, setting forth those fit for duty, those sick, the changes during the month by transfer, by desertion, by discharges, by entries on board, &c. He is required, also, to make monthly returns of the state of the accounts of those who have died and deserted. He *procures* and *pays* for all supplies furnished the vessel in foreign parts; and in most cases, owing to a particular form of an account prescribed by the Navy Department, he *makes out* said accounts in triplicate, for the persons furnishing said supplies. He is required, on arrival of the vessel at a foreign port, no matter what distance she may be anchored from the shore, or however boisterous may be the weather, to proceed immediately and make a contract for furnishing the crew with fresh provisions; to collect and purchase such articles of any and every kind as may be required; to make out the accounts and settle them. He is of course the paymaster of the vessel; he negotiates all kinds of exchange when abroad, and has the correspondence growing out of it to attend to. Added to all this, is one of his most laborious duties—that of making up periodically, through the year, his voluminous accounts for settlement at the Treasury Department. These are filled with intricate calculations, requiring very great accuracy and nicety of

computation, and consist in triplicate copies of every roll and paper, together with triplicate copies of all abstracts and loose vouchers that have been hereinbefore named.

The purser is required to keep a separate account with the sick, for articles of provisions supplied on the surgeon's requisitions to them; and these are charged to the medical department, or against the rations of the sick, which are stopped; and this opens, again, a most perplexing and laborious account.

The foregoing briefly recapitulates (or is intended to do so) the most important duties that appertain to a purser at sea; much of his incidental duty and occupation, however, have been no doubt omitted. Still it is no doubt sufficient to confirm the justness of the assertion: that a purser performs, in all situations that he may be placed *on service*, the duties of *four distinct grades in the army*, viz: paymaster, quartermaster, commissary, and sutler. We will take, for example, a line-of-battle ship, a frigate, and a sloop of war; there are on board these three vessels, at the smallest calculation, fifteen hundred officers and men; and with the same number of officers and men in the army, no one will pretend to deny that at least ten or twelve officers, consisting of paymasters, quartermasters, commissaries, and assistant commissaries of subsistence, and sutlers, are employed to perform those duties which are now transacted in the navy by the three respective pursers of those three vessels, who have upon their shoulders not only the responsibility, but the positive duties of them all. It may certainly with great truth be said, that, in the army there is no corresponding rank with a purser in the navy; for it is really the case that pursers have *no rank at all*, with regard to their comparative duties. However, it becomes only necessary to put the following plain questions:

1st. Are not the duties of a paymaster confined strictly to paying every two months, or at other periods, the officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates of his district: and is not that duty, as connected with the naval branch of the service, performed by a purser, wherever he may be stationed?

2d. Does not the duty of an assistant commissary of subsistence consist exclusively in the receipt and expenditure of provisions? and is not this another duty which devolves upon a purser?

3d. Who is the officer in the army appointed to receive and issue the public clothing; and by whom are the accounts paid for transportation, attendance on courts-martial, for extra services, travelling expenses, fuel, quarters, &c.; is it not the quartermaster? and is not that duty performed also by a purser in the navy?

4th. Who in the army is provider of such articles of small stores as are permitted by its laws for the comfort and convenience of the men: is it not the sutler? and is not this also performed by a purser in the navy?

It is here proper to remark, that pursers receive no remuneration from the Government for their heavy disbursements either at sea or at navy-yards; that they are liable to be kept "on leave," or in the position of "waiting orders," so long as the Navy Department may think proper to keep them there; and that they are forbidden by law, as well as considerations of prudence, from embarking in any business, not knowing at what moment they may be called upon for service; that the pay and emoluments of a purser, while in this position, is but \$620 per annum. And furthermore, if the bill now before the Senate should become a law in its

present shape, without amendment, it cannot possibly yield to him, at the end of thirty years' chances of service, *as much* money as would be received by the commander of a schooner, with whom the purser should commence his service in his noviciate, after the same period of service. Add to this, that the purser acquires no additional rank; his pecuniary reward, therefore, for responsible and arduous duties, is all he can look forward to.

NOTE.—On the return of a vessel to the United States, the purser is required to close up every one's account, and pay off the crew, taking all necessary receipts and vouchers. He demands surveys on all public property in his charge, and turns into the naval store (taking the receipts required in such cases from the proper officers) every thing in his possession of a public nature. Connected with a purser's duties, it must then appear that his responsibilities are great, and his disbursements large, subjecting him to much liability of loss, from the hurried manner in which those duties have to be performed. Should he accidentally pay an *officer* too much in the settlement of his account, "no facilities are furnished for its recovery by the Navy Department;" he has therefore to collect it the best way he can. Moreover, it has always been, and still is the case, notwithstanding the strictest accuracy in his accounts, that losses are sustained in the payments to mechanics and laborers, &c.—the chances invariably being against the purser, and in no case falling on the Government; the purser being required by law, before he enters upon the discharge of his duties, to file in the Navy Department bonds, with security to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars.

DUTY OF PURSERS AT NAVY-YARDS.

The duty of a purser at a navy-yard consists principally in paying the officers, seamen, &c., in the service of the United States; and the mechanics and laborers *not in the service*, but employed by the Government on the public works, such as the erection of public buildings, and construction of national vessels; incidental to which, he has at most of the yards a considerable number of officers residing in the vicinity and neighboring States upon his roll for monthly pay. The number of mechanics and laborers employed at navy-yards varies from between three and four hundred to one thousand, with the exception of the yard at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where there has usually been a less number. A roll is furnished *semi-monthly* to the purser; setting forth the names and number of persons, the number of days' work for which they are entitled to pay, and the pay per diem of each individual. It will be seen, then, that much labor is required from the frequency of these payments, in the mere *calculation* of so many accounts, involving as they do small amounts of from \$15 to \$50 to each individual, paid every two weeks, and made up of a per diem pay, that consists in fractions of the dollar almost invariably; hence requiring, for the safety of the disbursing officer, great accuracy both in calculation and paying out. In addition to these semi-monthly rolls and payments, the purser makes out and calculates the roll of officers *not attached to his station*, but residing in the vicinity "on leave" or "waiting orders," whom he also pays monthly. Again, he keeps a separate roll of

what is termed the ordinary of the yard, by which is implied the officers, seamen, &c. attached thereto, whom he pays also monthly; thus making to each purser of a navy-yard three pay days in each month; to which must be added the hospital and rendezvous.* The provisions furnished at navy yards by the Government are placed in the hands of, and charged to, the purser; he is held responsible for these, and they are issued *daily* under his directions, the Government allowing him seven and a half per cent. for wastage and loss, naturally arising from their being measured and weighed out in small quantities. Beyond this per centage the purser is charged on settlement of his accounts quarterly at the Treasury, and he cannot, should there be an excess instead of a deficiency, receive the least advantage from it. He keeps abstracts of the receipts and expenditure of provisions during the quarter, and a *daily* account is kept and a return made of provisions issued, and these are settled quarterly at the Treasury, with the purser's account of disbursements. The Government clothing is placed in charge of the purser, and he is held responsible for it; abstracts of the receipts and expenditure thereof during the quarter are kept by him, and settled also quarterly with his other accounts. This branch of his duty, however, is more limited at navy yards than on shipboard, unless there happens to be a receiving ship at the station, when it is the same as at sea.

It will appear, then, from the foregoing statement, that the duties of a purser and his assistant are arduous and multiplied; for as fast as the calculations are made, and the roll of one fortnight paid off, (which is done by the purser in person,) his attention must be immediately turned to another, and his application to his business constant, (as it not unfrequently is to a late hour in the evening,) or it is impossible to keep pace with the multifarious rolls and accounts which are always before him. Added to these, the purser has an extensive correspondence with officers not at his station, but borne upon his books for pay, and residing at a distance, to many of whom it is necessary to address a letter, as they are usually paid by drafts. To say, then, nothing of his responsibilities of a pecuniary character entirely, his disbursements are heavy, and his accounts varied and multifarious, requiring industry and no inconsiderable labor, particularly when considered in detail.

All of which is most respectfully submitted.

WASHINGTON, *January 7, 1837.*

WASHINGTON CITY, *January 18, 1837.*

DEAR SIR: After a critical examination of the bill proposed by the purser of the navy, I am enabled to give it my unqualified approbation. The graduated pay, such as surgeons now receive when on shore off duty, is a most excellent feature; and the additional per centages (see the bill herewith) when on duty, I consider no more than an equitable compensation for the great moneyed responsibilities, the complicated and laborious duties they have to perform.

The idea entertained by some of the naval committee of the House of Representatives, as I am informed, that *any* person is competent to execute

* This account embraces three months' pay in advance to all persons entering the service.

the duties of an officer of that corps, is most erroneous ; for even among the most talented, several years' experience in actual service at sea is essential to their correct performance.

In relation to the time the bill should go into effect as proposed by Mr. Jarvis in his bill, viz : "on the first day of April next, for all vessels and pursers in the United States ; and for all vessels and pursers which may be absent from the United States, the provisions of this act shall go into effect from and after *their return* to the United States," I feel constrained to remark that it would be ruinous to the service. The crews of vessels sailing hence after the 1st of April next would be furnished with tea and sugar (as component parts of their ration) without charge, while those now at sea, and all sailing from the United States anterior to that period, would be compelled to pay their pursers *fifty per cent.* on the cost and charges of the *same articles*; a state of things admirably calculated to create mutiny. To obviate this serious difficulty, I would recommend its going into effect at home on the 1st April, 1837, and abroad on the 1st July, 1837; those being the commencements of Government quarters, and thereby producing uniformity and convenience in the settlement of accounts at the Fourth Auditor's office. To prevent the difficulty that may be occasioned by the death of a purser during his cruise, whereby his successor might receive compensation due to the former, commission should be allowed on what was due to the officers and crew at the end of the quarter preceding his decease.

I have the honor to be

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES G. RIDGELY.

To the Hon. WM. C. RIVES,

Senator of the United States.

WASHINGTON, January 18, 1837.

DEAR SIR: I have been made acquainted with the particulars of the pursers' bill now before the Senate, which I highly approve of, in all its details. The duties of pursers are arduous, and require talent and time to become familiar with. The responsibilities, too, are great, and I am happy to learn that there is a prospect of their receiving what, in my opinion, is nothing more than a fair compensation.

I am, very respectfully,

Yours, &c.,

FOXHALL A. PARKER.

To J. COLSTON, Esq.,

Purser United States Navy.

WASHINGTON, January 18, 1837.

GENTLEMEN: I have seen and examined the proposed plan to regulate the pay and emoluments of pursers in the navy, viz: to allow them, hereafter, while attached to vessels for sea service, $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the amount of money, stores, &c. received and disbursed, and half per cent. on their disbursements at navy yards, and a graduated pay per annum similar to the

one now received by surgeons in the navy on shore off duty ; since neither grade is in the line of promotion, though opportunity frequently offers to the surgeon which cannot occur to the purser, of pecuniary benefit from professional practice when on shore and not employed by the Government. I should be much gratified if a law were passed to change the present system, and adopt the proposed one, in regard to the pay of pursers. I have no doubt, whatever, that it would give general satisfaction to the officers and seamen, and benefit the service generally.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN THOMAS NEWTON.

To MESSRS. CLARK and ETTING,

Pursers U. S. Navy.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,

Fourth Auditor's Office, January 19, 1837.

SIR : In reply to the inquiries contained in your letter of the 17th instant, I have to say that, undoubtedly, in my opinion, the situation of a purser in our navy is one of great importance and responsibility, and that the duties pertaining to it are arduous, complex, and diversified ; so much so that the most experienced and vigilant pursers are often embarrassed. I will give one example among many that might be referred to, to prove this. The expenditures on board a 74, which returned not long ago from a cruise of about two years and eight months, amounted to about half a million of dollars. The purser of that ship has been twenty-five years in service, has had great experience, and is regarded as a very correct, industrious, and vigilant disbursing officer, and yet there were suspended from his account upwards of \$4,000, some of his vouchers being considered insufficient in this office ; and although the whole amount may go ultimately to his credit, yet the suspensions give great trouble both to the purser and the Auditor. And besides these suspensions, items of purser's accounts are often absolutely disallowed, and are lost to them. Nor is this at all surprising when the great variety of objects embraced by the expenditures is considered, and the perplexing questions relating to law and regulation that are continually recurring.

I am, sir, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

J. C. PICKETT.

To. H. ETTING, Esq.,

Purser United States Navy.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,

January 20, 1837.

SIR : Some of the pursers of the navy have requested me to express to you my opinion as to the inadequacy of their pay and compensation. I am convinced that, in many cases, their compensation is inadequate, and more particularly when doing duty at navy yards, which I hope may be

increased; and should the navy ration be altered, as proposed, it will take from the pursers a considerable portion of their profits, and for this, in my opinion, an adequate compensation should be made to them; and it appears that the pay while off duty is insufficient.

I have the honor to be,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

MAHLON DICKERSON.

To the Hon. WM. C. RIVES,

Senate Chamber.

WASHINGTON, January 28, 1837.

DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 17th instant, relative to the duties of a purser in the navy, was duly received, but ill health for some days, and incessant occupation since, have taken up every moment of my time.

I consider the office of purser one of the most important and responsible in the Government. No man is fit for it who is not a first rate accountant, of sound intelligence, polite manners, and regular habits. He must look about him, or, instead of making anything by his service, he will find it a direct road to ruin.

I cannot too strongly express my sense of the importance, inspired by the nature of their occupation, and an inspection of their accounts, of having for this service *first rate men*.

With high regard,

Your obedient servant,

AMOS KENDALL.

To H. ETTING, Esq.,

Purser United States Navy.

UNITED STATES NAVY YARD,

Washington, February 8, 1837.

DEAR SIR: The bill reported on the 2d instant, by the Naval Committee of the Senate, to establish the navy ration, and for the better regulation of your pay, &c., is now before me.

By this I learn with great satisfaction that the pursers of the navy have the cheering prospect of being placed on the highly respectable footing to which their corps is so justly entitled and deserving.

The navy is, I believe, unanimous that you should be paid, like other officers, by the Government, and not by profits from the crews. It strikes me as equally proper and just that said pay and emoluments should be proportioned to the duties performed and responsibilities incurred, as arranged in the abovementioned judicious bill; but I would suggest that said act shall go into effect on the 1st April, 1837.

I have also perused with attention and satisfaction the letters in relation to the subject of a change of compensation to pursers, and the future supplies of our crews, from the honorable the Secretary of the Navy, the

Postmaster General, the Fourth Auditor of the Treasury, Commodore Ridgely, Captain Parker, and Master Commandant Newton, and concur entirely in all the opinions expressed by them.

Very respectfully, I am,

Your obedient servant,

DANL. T. PATTERSON.

TO FRANCIS B. STOCKTON, Esq.,

Purser United States Navy.

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT,

February 26, 1838.

DEAR SIR: Having frequently conversed with many of the pursers of the navy, during a considerable time past, respecting a change in the mode of receiving their compensation for services; and having at one period been for a considerable length of time doing the duties of a purser myself, and having seen a number of projects and plans which have at various times been brought forward to accomplish that object satisfactorily, and amongst others the one which proposes graduated pay and commissions, I have no hesitation in saying, I consider that a fair and equitable mode, and the one best calculated, in my opinion, to insure a faithful discharge of their duties, and insure them a reasonable and proper compensation. I therefore hope to see it adopted.

I am, very respectfully, &c.,

Your most obedient servant,

T. H. GREGORY.

JAMES H. CLARK, Esq.,

United States Navy, Washington, D. C.

